

# The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

BULLETIN EIGHTY-EIGHT

SUMMER, 1964

## Thoreau and the Current Non-Violent Struggle for Integration

by William Stuart Nelson (Vice-President, Howard University). An address delivered at the annual meeting of the Thoreau Society on July 11, 1964, and reprinted from the Concord Journal.

This year Americans significantly have observed concurrently the centennial anniversaries of Thoreau's death and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Attention has been drawn by one Thoreau scholar to the greater alliveness in present day thought of Thoreau as compared with his more celebrated contemporaries - Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell and Holmes. One explanation may be that Thoreau spoke fearlessly and with special power to the same problems, in a different guise, as those with which Americans wrestle today.

Within months of Thoreau's delivery of his stirring "Plea for Captain John Brown," Abraham Lincoln took the position in his Cooper Institute speech that slavery was wrong and that on this subject no common ground existed for those who supported and those opposed that institution. As Thoreau lay dying in 1862, sick at heart for his country then at war, Lincoln moved step by step toward freeing the slaves and issued the Emancipation Proclamation that same year.

Today, one hundred years later, Negroes in America are engaged in another freedom struggle, the struggle for full American citizenship as guaranteed them by the Constitution and for the relationship to the American society presupposed by the "American Creed." To this struggle Thoreau speaks as freshly and as pertinently as he did to the slavery of his lifetime.

Within the past few years, prisons of the South have overflowed with Negroes whose sin has been to protest collectively and peacefully the denial to them of the legal and moral rights of our society. This nonviolent movement began in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, as a bus boycott under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and has taken many forms in many places. Indeed, there has been no lack of ingenuity in designating the forms

this movement has taken: sit-ins, bathe-ins, kneel-ins, freedom rides.

What moved Mrs. Rosa Parks, a seamstress, to refuse in 1955 a bus driver's order to give up her seat and move back in an already crowded bus -- a seat which a white man would have occupied while she stood? The answer is "she had had enough." Why since 1955 have Negroes marched, suffered insult, brutal beatings, imprisonment for peaceful protest? They have had enough. But are there not more normal, undeniably legal ways of protest? There are. Negroes answer, however, that they have petitioned for a hundred years and they have pleaded until their throats are dry, and still their rights are denied them in a hundred ways. They have argued before the courts, ably supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an organization founded for that specific purpose. Some victories have been won but Negroes have learned also to what degree courts in the former slave states can make a mockery of justice. Moreover, when a signal court victory was won, that of the Supreme Court in the case of desegregation of schools under state support, they have discovered after ten years that less than eight per cent of Negro children are in Southern racially integrated schools. Many a Negro child born on the day or in the year of this historic decision still awaits the privilege of entering a non-segregated school. But even were the schools of America open to all without regard to race, that would not be enough. What the Negro needs in his relationship with his fellow Americans is to feel a sense of community.

What of the ballot? For the right to vote these citizens have pleaded and in the hundredth year of their freedom they have met in a church to receive instruction in voter registration and for their pains this church was burned and shots were fired into the homes of these citizens.

These Negro Americans walk the streets jobless on account of color; they live in ghettos on account of color. They are segregated in public accommodations and denied admission to Christian churches on Easter morning, as if they were lepers.

In the light of these and many other bitter facts there is no wonder that Martin Luther King, gentle leader of the present movement to secure the vote in

Alabama, some time ago professed in quiet agony, "Our cup of endurance runneth over." This explains the recent headline of a Negro weekly which read, "We're Ready to Die. War Declared on Segregated Birmingham." This is what led James Baldwin to close his letter to a nephew with the words "You know, and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom too soon"; and closes his Letter From a Region in My Mind with the words from a biblically derived slave song "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time!" The fire next time!

There are doubtless those who cry for a Thoreau to stir the heart of this Nation. But we have a Thoreau in every library, in every bookstore, in every seat of learning. If the Nation would only listen to the outpouring of the pure, brave, compassionate heart of this man, I think it would be stirred.

Thoreau recognized with extraordinary prescience the nature of the weaknesses which immobilize a nation in the presence of a mortal crisis. It was in relation to slavery that Thoreau felt his fellow citizens were losing their souls. One weakness was that they permitted money to come between them and the objects of their duty -- not simply money, but the things which money could buy. And thus, he said, as did Jesus before him, men gain the whole world but lose their souls. He saw the opponents of reform in Massachusetts to be "not a hundred thousand politicians at the South, but a hundred thousand merchants and farmers here, who are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, cost what it may." The rich man is sold to the institution that makes him rich.

What matters, says Thoreau, is action based on principle, the ability to see the right and to act upon it.

When Oglethorpe and the trustees of Georgia sought to discourage the establishment of slavery there on moral grounds, their English agent supported the clamor of the colonists for the institution of slavery and argued: "In Spight of all Endeavours to disguise this Point, it is as clear as light itself, that Negroes are as essentially necessary to the

cultivation of Georgia, as Axes, Hoes, or any other Unensil of Agriculture."

To this Thoreau would have answered: "A man had better starve at once than lose his innocence in the process of getting his bread." What man of substance in Thoreau's day would have been moved had he heard such unworthy chatter as this? Would he have been moved if he had read what Thoreau wrote: "...aye, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America." I think this man of substance would not have been moved.

Things have a strangle hold on men, Thoreau was galled by his "craven-hearted neighbors" as he called them who spoke disparagingly of John Brown for sacrificing his life. For what, he asked, did they throw away their lives? These were in the words of "neighbors who would praise a man for attacking singly an ordinary band of thieves or murderers. Such minds," he said, "are not equal to the occasion. They preserve the so-called peace of their community by deeds of petty violence every day. So they defend their hen roosts, and maintain slavery."

Martin Luther King has lamented that his cup runneth over and James Baldwin has warned of the fire next time. But of greater interest to the growing millions of large money makers is the daily news from the stock market. One of our Presidents, you may recall, instructed us that "the business of America is business," (quoted by Eric Sevareid in "The President was Coolidge) How is business? Certainly that is the absorbing question. Has it been right these years to throw men into prison for seeking to purchase a sandwich in self respect at the Southern city branch of a multi-million dollar business? The New York owners have depended upon the Alabama police and their dogs to handle this situation. I believe I have heard of no threat by chain-business owners to move their businesses from sections of the country where American citizens cannot in honor make purchases in those outlets. Conceivably, a bus company will close its business because of loss of profits. I think I have heard of no bus company, however, threatening to



close its business merely on account of a boycott or because it was ashamed of the injustice to darker fellow citizens to which this company was contributing. To what extent have businessmen opened their doors to the employment of Negroes voluntarily, gladly, to hasten their emancipation? Tardily this begins to happen. Why must men march, sing, pray, go to prison, in order to secure what is long overdue?

Businessmen, although fierce competitors among themselves, are united in powerful organizations, and when their profits are threatened by government action, for example, they thunder back with a voice that shakes the nation. Have these organizations ever met to consider how businessmen might observe the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in the absence of a kind of second Emancipation Proclamation recently passed by the Congress? If they answer that business is business, our fears are confirmed, Thoreau was right. Today as yesterday men have defended their hen roosts and maintained a kind of slavery.

The charge which Thoreau leveled against the economic oligarchy of his time he leveled also against the political oligarchy. "I cannot for an instant," he wrote, "recognize the political organization as my government which is the slave's government also."

Thoreau was not alone in his hatred of slavery. His complaint was that, although his fellow citizens opposed human bondage in theory, they yet remained completely passive, doing nothing, sitting on their hands and esteeming themselves the disciples of Washington and Franklin.

Sometimes, indeed, these men petitioned but they did nothing in real earnest and with effect. They waited for others to remedy the evil. At most they offered a cheap vote and showed a feeble countenance and wished Godspeed to the right as it passed by.

This, held Thoreau, was the way with voting. The character of the voter is not at stake. He is willing to leave the issue to the majority. If in the morning he awakens and finds that the wrong-headed majority has won, he goes his way more or less undisturbed.

This was not the way to reform society, Thoreau believed. If a man is cheated of a dollar he takes effective means to retrieve his dollar. It is action, action from principle that changes things and relations. "Action from principle," wrote Thoreau, "the perception and the performance of right... changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything that was. It not only divides states and churches, it divides families, aye, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine."

In the presence of an inert and moribund government, what can the people do? They can do what Thoreau did -- not lightly, but at the command of a voice deep within, of a law that transcends government. They can refuse to obey government. Then let government act, let it run "amok," as Thoreau expressed it, against them.

Its desperation will then be apparent for men will see through its pretensions.

Even one man, proclaimed Thoreau, can bring a people to its feet for a principle. "Any man," he said, "more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already." This is what Thoreau called casting one's whole vote, not merely a strip of paper, but his whole influence. One honest man in Massachusetts, he believed, ceasing to hold slaves, subjecting himself to imprisonment, would have been the abolition of slavery in America.

But what is this honest man to do? The answer Thoreau gives is that "under a government that imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison . . . . It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian who have come to plead the wrongs of his race" should find this honest man.

If one honest man submitting himself to imprisonment could have stirred men to their depths against the institution of slavery, what would a thousand such men do today to rid our society of racial injustice? This is not an act to betray the state but to elevate the conscience to its proper place, to help it take up where the state leaves off, to save the state from those who will not simply disobey but destroy it.

This principle, elaborated by Thoreau, Mohandas K. Gandhi understood profoundly. For his movement, begun in South Africa at the beginning of this century, he adopted the term Civil Disobedience, from Thoreau's essay by that name, later replacing Civil Disobedience by Civil Resistance. At more than one critical moment Gandhi derived support from Thoreau for his resistance to the government. It will be recalled that Thoreau in his "Essay on Civil Disobedience" makes the distinction between the friction inherent in a machine which can be tolerated and friction which has its machine, that is, supported by the structure of power itself. Governments have their friction which may be borne, since the friction may wear off. When, however, this friction has its machine, then the machine passes its point of usefulness and must go. Thus in South Africa Gandhi felt that in the Asiatic Registration Act, British Indians were being subjected to a law which not only contained some evil but was evil legalized. Resistance to such a law was in Gandhi's view a divine duty. Not only in South Africa but throughout Gandhi's thirty years of struggle for India's freedom the spirit of Thoreau was present to inspire and strengthen him.

Now, in the tradition of Thoreau and Gandhi, we have a Martin Luther King. The deeper Dr. King delved into the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, the weaker became his skepticism of the power of love for social reform. As he launched into the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 he remembered Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience," read in his college days, and concluded that what he confronted was not

friction but an evil system supported by law. The time had arrived for him to cast his whole vote, not a strip of paper, but his total self in action against the evil. He and his followers have broken the laws, laws which do not represent friction in government but evil supported by the machine of government. Against this evil they have launched their bodies and their spirits. If Thoreau believed that one honest man in prison for his belief could destroy slavery, perhaps a thousand, ten thousand American citizens protesting with their bodies and spirits may advance the Negro in America an appreciable distance in the direction of his full emancipation.

The passage of the civil rights bill reminds us once more of our Nation's magnificent heritage in its Declaration of Independence, its Constitution, declarations of our great statesmen, in short, in the "American Creed." It reminds us also that too often where human rights are demanded it is raw power that gets results -- economic, political, disturbance-making power. Sometime, somewhere men had better learn that the world will not go on indefinitely yielding before the pressures of power. One day, to avoid the holocaust, Armageddon, they must act upon the basis of inner stirrings, impelled by the will to justice, by the will to love.

In organized society there stands along with business interests and government the organizations of religion as a possible source of social redemption. This Thoreau understood clearly. His difficulty was to discover an organized expression of religion that fulfilled the promise that lay within it.

Very early he made clear his attitude toward the church, in this instance his father's church, a liberal one by the day's standards. He signed off from this church and refused to pay a tax to support its minister. His opinion of the "orthodox" church of his day is clear from the fact that he lectured in one -- in Amherst, New Hampshire -- and later expressed the hope that thereby he had helped to undermine it. He was especially disenchanted with the churches of his day because of their opposition to abolition and their conservatism generally. For him real churches were the wild and steeped woods.

The Christian of Thoreau's day fared little better in his opinion than the churches. The modern Christian he described as "man who has consented to say the prayers of the liturgy provided you will let him go straight to bed and sleep quietly afterward. All his prayers," said Thoreau, "begin with 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' and he is forever looking to the time when he shall go to the 'long rest.'"

Thoreau attended a peace meeting where a Deacon Brown and others signed a pledge "to treat mankind as brothers henceforth!" Thoreau remarked that he would wait and see first how they treated him.

As Thoreau was "perfection-seeking," "wisdom-loving," he

was also "dogma-disbelieving," "sham-hating." Bradford Torrey in his introduction to Volume I of Thoreau's Journal called him "open-minded," shut up in no creed, to whom one could talk without running up against "some institution." His difficulty with creeds was that men think the creeds they profess are more important than what they themselves are. He himself was shut up in no creed. "The gods," he said, "are of no one sect; they side with no man."

He was not anti-Christian. His concern was that so few Christians could be found among his contemporaries and that, in the words of Arthur E. Christy, "after eighteen hundred years and a new world the humble life of a Jewish peasant should issue in a bigoted New York bishop."

On the other hand the words of Jesus gave Thoreau a rock of faith upon which to stand. Speaking of the sayings of Jesus, he wrote, "Let but one of these sentences be rightly read from any pulpit in the land and there would not be left one stone of that meeting house upon another."

For Thoreau, that which was most godlike was the good act, the noble spirit, the chaste mind, a life normally good and good for something. "Men," he said, "talk about Bible miracles because there are no miracles in their own lives." Goodness for him was the only investment which never fails but goodness meant to be good for something. Man bears responsibility to God for the disposal of his talents. His religion, therefore, centered in the good life, in the moral rather than the theological, in the immanent as well as the transcendent, for in man there rests something of the divine. With this insight these charming lines agree:

"Thou art not gone, being gone, where'er thou art"

"Thou leav'st in us thy watchful eyes, in us they loving heart."

Love he valued even above truth, for "Nothing," he said, "is plain but love!" Truth must remain an enigma with a man only defining his relation to it but rendering "no account of truth to herself."

Thoreau was not anti-religious. His problem was to locate practitioners of what he believed religion to be. "Who are the religious?" he asked, and he answered: "They who do not differ much from mankind generally except that they are more conservative and timid and useless, but who in their conversation and correspondence talk about kindness and Heavenly Father, instead of going bravely about their business, trusting God ever."

Thoreau believed in God, with whom he felt to be on good terms. When on his death bed he was asked whether he had made his peace with God, he answered that he had never quarrelled with him. Thoreau reveled in the wisdom of all the great scriptures in many of which he read deeply and was moved by the "deep spiritual warmth of the East." To him truth in them was still truth however alien its expression to what he regarded as our limited religious



outlook. For him the gods belong to no sect; they side with no man. "When," he mused, "I imagine that Nature inclined rather to some few earnest and faithful souls, and especially existed for them, I go to see an obscure individual who lives under the hill, letting both gods and men alone, and find that strawberries and tomatoes grow for him too in his garden there, and the sun lodges kindly on his hillside, and I am compelled to acknowledge the unbribable charity of the gods." Contrast this spirit with the uncharitable answer of President Kruger of the Transvaal when in 1880 Indians in South Africa complained of their maltreatment at the hands of South Africans: "You are," he said, "descendants of Ishmael and therefore from your very birth bound to slave for the descendants of Esau. As the descendants of Esau we cannot admit you to rights placing you on equality with ourselves. You must rest content with the rights we grant you." Or contrast Thoreau's spirit with that of American slave holders who sought ease of conscience on the grounds that Hagar was a slave and in Genesis it is recorded that "the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit unto her hands." Or compare the altar at which Thoreau worshipped with the system that taught Governor Barnett of Mississippi to proclaim that "The Good Lord was the original segregationist. He has made us white and he intends that we stay that way."

Howard Mumford Jones in an Atlantic article on Thoreau reminds us of Pascal's comment on such a mental and moral state as this. He wrote: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Or, one is moved to inquire, is it really conviction?

Thoreau was not a pacifist. For him passive resistance was not enough where wrong was rampant. "I do not wish to kill or be killed," he said, "but I foresee circumstances in which both of these things would be by me unavoidable. In extremities I could even be killed." And yet he would not kill a bird despite his scientific interests or even hold it in his hands. "I would rather hold it in my affections," he said.

One basic quality of non-violence he did possess in generous measure, and that was the religious quality of compassion. It was not simply sorrow for the suffering man but identification with him.

Some may find it difficult to associate this quality with Thoreau. It was nonetheless present. His identification with the evil linked to the extension of slavery led him to prison; his unity in spirit with John Brown enabled Thoreau to defend him in the face of bitter hostility and threatened violence. Most men saw and judged John Brown from the outside. Thoreau knew and felt him from within. When the village postmaster was reported to have said of John Brown, "He died as the fool dieth," Thoreau said he should have been answered as follows: "He did not live as the fool liveth, and he died as he lived."

Thoreau saw through the crust of John Brown's violence, a violence which Brown had learned from thousands of years of pagan and Christian history and the practice of his own time. Thoreau, penetrating that crust, identified himself with the spirit of the man which sought the overthrow of an evil system.

This quiet man whom some called a recluse was at times very busy. These were occasions when he led a slave from his retreat at Walden Pond "toward the North Star"; or when at personal risk he put a slave on the train leaving for Canada or calmed a fleeing slave in his Concord home where the slave was fed, his swollen feet bathed, and his freedom guarded by this lover of liberty. This is compassion.

One test of a man's religion, perhaps the final one, is what he inspires in others. Bronson Alcott observed: "I should say he inspired love, if indeed the sentiment he awakened did not seem to partake of something yet purer, if that were possible, and as yet nameless from its rarity and excellence."

The relevance of Thoreau's religion to the nonviolent movement in America today is not far to seek. One can afford to pity if not to condone Governor Barnett and his fellow believers whose religiosity stands in stark contrast to the religious spirit of Thoreau. They are the victims of a way of life which has so blinded its products that they profess a religion the true meaning of which has never dawned upon them, refer to a God the real nature of whom has never entered their consciousness.

What can we say, however, of a religion, when in the churches which preach it, millions who profess it will not even sit beside another professor of that religion before the altar of their God, because his skin is black? What can we say of the thousands of churches in our land from whose pulpits no voice is raised in righteous protest when men are beaten, jailed, and murdered as they plead for simple justice? What is the church and what is the character of its religion?

Negroes in America not only raise these questions but are acting increasingly upon the assumption that whatever may be the virtues of these churches they are irrelevant to the darker man's profoundest needs. These churches are wedded to other loyalties. It is noteworthy that some months ago the Reverend Daisuke Kitawage, Negro Executive Secretary of Domestic Mission of the Episcopal Church, was reported to have warned two hundred white Christian leaders of the World Council of Churches that colored peoples of the world "have cast the vote of non-confidence" in white Christian leadership. In this group of colored peoples he included Negroes in America, American Indians, Africans. This spirit of no confidence obtains, he said, in spite of "conferences, consultations, sermons, pronouncements, resolutions, policy statements and principles of practice. . . literally millions of words" on the part of these churches.

Some facts will forever mar the history of the American

churches. Where have they been during the present long struggle for civil rights? Of late they began to march and to speak only to draw attention to their silent years. There are some noble examples of courage and sacrifice by religious leaders. Praise of them, however, calls attention to the thousands of religious leaders and millions of communicants who have been silent. Theological institutions, now prepared to receive Negro students, look in vain for the numbers they hoped to find, and ask where they are. The answer is that they are not interested. Their concept of the church they would serve is based not upon its spires, its creeds, the beauty of its ritual but upon the record of its relations to human kind.

In his dilemma the Negro in America has discovered another avenue of religious expression. It is nonviolent action. Ministers, attracted to this expression, have subordinated dogma and ecclesiastical niceties to a mode of action which they believe to be a genuine function of religion. These leaders have engaged the loyal following of thousands. Intelligent lay Negroes have applauded this adventure. One of the brightest of these, who long since had become disenchanted with the monotonous repetitions of religious stereotypes, declared exultantly that at last he was witnessing a kind of religion in which he could believe. It may be that the conjunction of the failures of organized religion in social reform and the agony of a religiously bred minority will precipitate a radical re-examination of religious values. Inasmuch as Thoreau, in no small

measure has prepared thoughtful minds for such an examination, his life and writings might well become a guide in the development of a future philosophy of religion.

It is difficult for Negroes themselves to fathom their mood during this one hundredth anniversary year of their emancipation. Perhaps it is a mood akin to that of Thoreau when Massachusetts shipped a slave, seized on the streets of Boston, back to Virginia. He wrote: "I have the sense of having suffered a vast and indefinite loss. I did not know at first what ailed me. At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country."

When word of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry reached New England Thoreau summoned his townspeople to hear him plead with uncommon eloquence for John Brown's character. On that night he asked, "When were the good and the brave ever in a majority?"

A century is a long night. It would appear time for a prosperous, democratic, religious, people to awake to the dreadful weight of their apostasy from the Nation's professions. They can. The power lies within them else a Thoreau could never have been born and have grown to his present stature. Let us now give proof of this. Let Americans today guarantee that their sons will not be able to say that once again their fathers closed their ears to the truth and were recreant to their faith in an hour of trial. To meet this demand, I believe, the American people have the power. The gods of destruction, however, must not be tempted too often. It may be the fire next time.

## THE 1964 ANNUAL MEETING . . .

The annual meeting of the Thoreau Society was held in the First Parish Church in Concord, Mass., on Saturday, July 11, 1962, with Walter Harding presiding. The minutes of the last meeting, as printed in Bulletin 84, were accepted. Walter Harding gave the following treasurer's report: On hand, 7/11/63, \$2135; Income: Dues, 853; lifememberships, 250; back copies, 171; gifts, 20; total, 1294; Expenses: Annual meeting, 140; postage, 377; printing, 532; incorporation, 50; misc., 83; total, 1182. On hand, 6/25/64, \$2247.

Robert Wild, chairman of the nominating committee, presented the following slate of officers: Roland Robbins, president; Mrs. Herbert Hosmer, president-elect; Robert Needham, vice-president; Walter Harding, secretary-treasurer—all for terms of one year; and Robert Needham and Mrs. Edmund Fenn, members of the executive committee for three years. (Note: other members of the executive committee include Mrs. Caleb Wheeler and George Rady, whose terms expire in 1965, and Reginald Cook and Brooks Atkinson, whose terms expire in 1966.) The above slate of officers was duly elected.

Mrs. Mary R. Sherwood made the following motion—that a Memorial Fund to Henry David Thoreau be established, and that it be deposited in a Concord, Mass., bank; that the account be set up in such a way that donors may contribute funds at any time; that the funds be set up under suitable controls and be administered by the Thoreau Society through trustees comprised of one or more



officers of the society and at least two members of the society at large with staggered terms of service to establish continuity; that the funds be accumulated for such primary purposes as the purchase of Thoreau Manuscripts or books, or Thoreau family possessions, as they become available on the market, for helping purchase and maintain the Thoreau Main Street house if it again becomes available, for any future needs at Walden Pond, for setting up scholarships for Thoreau studies, or for any comparable and unforeseeable financial needs as judged to be such by the society. A substitute for this motion, asking the president to appoint a committee to investigate the need for such a fund and to report at the next annual meeting, was passed. The president then appointed Roland Robbins, Mrs. Edmund Fenn, Mrs. Mary P. Sherwood, and Mr. Andrew Lane members of this committee and asked them to report at the 1965 annual meeting.

Mr. Paul Oehser presented a memorial tribute to Howard Zahniser, former president of the Thoreau Society, who passed away on May 6, 1964. Professor Lewis Leary spoke briefly of the new edition of Thoreau's works proposed by the Center for Editions of American Authors of the Modern Language Association and the society voted its endorsement of the project.

Walter Harding delivered the presidential address on "Thoreau at Walden," a chapter of his forthcoming biography of Thoreau. (This chapter will appear in the Fall, 1964, issue of Horizon.) Dr. William Stuart Nelson, speaker-of-the-day, read a paper on "Thoreau and the Current Non-violent Struggle for Integration," which is printed in this issue of the bulletin. A luncheon was served in the church vestry after which a question box was conducted at which members present submitted various questions pertaining to Thoreau and they were answered by the various Thoreau scholars present. In the afternoon Mrs. Caleb Wheeler conducted a tour of the historic sites of the town; Mrs. Mary Fenn, a hike to Ponkatasset; and Mrs. Mary Sherwood, a hike to Bateman Pond Woods. Tape recordings of radio programs on Thoreau were presented in the church vestry for those who preferred not to hike.

At the Saturday evening program at the church vestry, W. Stephen Thomas, director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, gave an illustrated lecture on "Thoreau and Mushrooms," and Roland Robbins repeated the "Thoreau Sounds" tape given at the 1963 annual meeting. On Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Sherwood lead a picnic hike to Bateman Pond.

#### NOTES AND QUERIES

The following have recently become life members of the Thoreau Society: Miss Joanne P. Johnston, Sioux City, Iowa; Mr. Aurin Chase, Princeton, N.J.; Miss Mary H. Chamberlin, Concord, Mass.; Mr. Daniel D. Shively, Indiana, Pa.; Prof. Kenneth E. Harris, Slippery Rock, Pa.; Miss Eleanor Nickerson, Cheshire, Conn.; Prof. Lewis Leary, New York, N.Y.; Mr. Richard Machemer, Centerport, Pa.; Dr. and Mrs. Kline A. Price, Washington, D.C.; Mr. Lloyd Rathbun, Concord, Mass.; Mr. Warren Robertson, Waukegan, Ill.; Mr. Philip R. Pepple, Kendallville, Ind.; Mr. Edward Dodd, Putney, Vt.; Mr. Thurston Taylor, Worcester, Mass.; and Mr. Harry H. Larkin, Buffalo, N.Y. Life membership is twenty-five dollars.

We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: H. Adel, E. Anderson, M. Bodfish, C. Bode, T. Bailey, M. Campbell, R. Cherry,

R. Chapman, G. Davis, C. Davis, L. Digby, M. Ferguson, R. Ganley, L. Hoffman, D. Kamen-Kaye, H. Lambert, N. Lehrman, A. Lowmes, V. Munoz, M. Meltzer, J. Morine, J. Mowbray, W. Peterson, L. Richardson, R. Story, M. Spofford, M. Sherwood, R. Schaedle, J. Salak, G. Taylor, E. Teale, H. Van-Fleet, S. Wellman, M. Wahl, and W. White.

#### ROLAND ROBBINS: A PROFILE, by Mary Fenn.

There are few people who can equal the zest for life of our president, Roland Robbins—a zest which takes many directions. We seldom see him without his camera, and usually his tape recorder too; taking minutes of meetings, recording historic ceremonies, or just catching the happy faces and voices at one of the Robbins famous cook-outs. He is a writer, a poet, an archaeologist, and a lecturer. He is also a builder. At his home in Lincoln, Mass., he has converted an old horse shed into a delightful workroom. It is perfectly natural then that the man who unearthed the site of Thoreau's cabin at Walden, checking its dimensions and construction, should build a replica as a model for his commercial enterprise of selling the huts for studios or guest houses. But his main job is his American Archaeology—digging at historic sites to unearth original foundations, as is so interestingly described in his book, Hidden America.

No white collar job this—but hard physical work in hot dusty ditches. So successful has he been in finding these old sites, that his good friend Mrs. Hosmer, our president-elect, with a twinkle in her eye, refers to him as a "dowser."

#### FROST AND THOREAU: A QUERY

I wonder if your bulletin may help me solve a problem which is important to me in my work on a biography of Robert Frost. My hope is that someone who knew the poet may have heard him say how and when he first discovered and read Walden. The question is important, because there is considerable evidence of Frost's kinship with, and indebtedness to, Thoreau. You might care to reprint two such bits of evidence as they appear in Selected Letters of Robert Frost. In a letter to that celebrated Thoreauvian, Walter Prichard Eaton, on 15 July 1915, Frost wrote,

"Far be it from me ... to regret that all the poetry isn't in verse. I'm sure I'm glad of all the unversified poetry of Walden -- and not merely the nature-descriptive, but narrative as in the chapter on the play with the loon on the lake, and character-descriptive as in the beautiful passage about the French-Canadian woodchopper. That last alone with some things in Turgenieff must have had a good deal to do with the making of me."

In a letter to another celebrated Thoreauvian, Wade Van Dore, on 24 June 1922, Frost wrote,

"First about Thoreau: I like him as well as you do. In one book (Walden) he surpasses everything we have had in America. You have found this out for yourself without my having told you; I have found it out for myself without your having told me. Isn't it beautiful that there can be such concert without collusion? That's the kind of "getting together" I can endure."—Lawrance Thompson, 611 Lake Drive, Princeton, New Jersey